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CSMC

Critical Studies In Mass Communication

A PUBLICATION OF THE SPEECH COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 9 NUMBER 2

JUNE 1992

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Muzak: On Functional Music and Power

SIMON C. JONES AND THOMAS G. SCHUMACHER

□—*This paper examines the phenomenon of “functional music” and its evolution as a social technology in the control and regulation of work, consumption, and public space. It argues that the practices of functional music articulate some of the characteristic ways in which power is exercised in capitalist societies and, moreover, that changes in the functional music industry indicate wider structural shifts in capitalism toward “post-Fordist” regimes of production and consumption. Through an analysis of the history, forms, and discourses of functional music, this paper examines the cultural and political significance of these transformations.*

THERE now exists an important and growing body of critical research on popular music in communication and cultural studies. However, in the quest to seek out counter-hegemonic styles and subcultural resistances in popular music, much of this research has tended to overlook the diverse contexts in which recorded music is now used in more mundane, utilitarian ways as an agent of cultural reproduction. In particular, it has tended to neglect one of the largest, yet far less visible, fields of musical production and circulation: that of “programmed” or “functional” music.¹

The sheer scope of functional music’s dissemination is empirically unquestionable. In the United States alone, it has been estimated that programmed music accounts for the greatest proportion of music heard in hours of exposure per capita (Beauchamp, 1989). The products of the Muzak Corporation, the largest of the programmed music companies, are heard by more than 80 million people daily in approximately 20 countries throughout the world (National Public Radio, 1991). In 1982, it was estimated that within the United States approximately one third of the population heard Muzak at some point in their day (Husch, 1984). Muzak now boasts of having 96 franchises providing programmed music to 135,000 businesses in 16 countries, and in 1990 the corporation grossed over \$50 million (Muzak Corporation, 1991; National Public Radio, 1991).

Background music, or muzak,² as it has come to be known generically in popular discourse, has long been considered the scourge of “good” music, both classical and popular. Muzak has traditionally been critiqued from one of two positions: either on aesthetic and musical grounds, as a form of sonic banality, musical “castration,” or “wallpaper music” (Friedrich, 1984; Hitchcock, 1980; Schaefer, 1977), or as an instance of cultural totalitarianism, reproducing an ideology of bureaucratic rationalism and perpetuating alienation and false consciousness (Hulting, 1988; Husch,

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1984; Yale, 1970–1971). In striving to avoid both of these positions, our intentions here are not to critique muzak as *music*, per se, nor to reduce muzak to an unambiguous reflection of a monolithic, “dominant ideology.” Rather, we wish to examine the practices and discourses of functional music, how they have evolved historically, their role in the regulation of work and consumption, and their reproduction of particular kinds of economic, spatial, and symbolic power relations. Drawing on Foucault’s (1980) analysis of the power/knowledge nexus, we examine how functional music emerged as a “disciplinary technology” in the workplace, particularly within the labor processes of Fordism and Taylorism. Muzak’s research and programming strategies are then considered as examples of the transferral of rational, scientific, and medical discourses about the “body” into the field of industry. Recovering aspects of Adorno’s (1941/1990) account of the standardization of “popular music,” we then examine the textual forms of Muzak and some of their accompanying marketing ideologies. Finally, we look at the reconfiguration of functional music under emerging “post-Fordist” regimes of consumption and production.

HARD LABOR AND EASY LISTENING: MUZAK AND POWER IN THE WORKPLACE

Foucault (1980) has shown how specific practices of power that emerged in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were a precondition and “fundamental instrument in the constitution of industrial capitalism and of the type of society that is its accompaniment” (p. 105). Foucault speaks of “disciplinary technologies” that arise in specific institutions—prisons, hospitals, schools, factories—but subsequently become general formulae of domination, operating throughout the social body as a whole (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). For Foucault, these practices of power operate in more diffuse, depersonalized, and anonymous ways, through detailed routines and functions that can be measured and regulated around a norm. Power, for Foucault, is “productive” as much as it is simply “repressive.” It solicits ways of thinking, self-understanding, and self-discipline. Power is exercised on the minds and bodies of individuals through the regulation of consciousness and “feelings.” It operates directly on the body, on its physiological processes and sensations, with the aim of forging a “docile body” that may be “subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, 1979, p. 136).

Foucault’s notion of an intimate and reciprocal relationship between the exercising of power and the production of knowledge has proved to be one of his most radical insights. For Foucault, the human and social sciences have been embroiled in practices of power from their very inception. The discourses of behavioral social science, in particular, were founded on conceptions of normality and scientificity derived from the rational, causal, and positivistic discourses of biological and medical sciences (Smart, 1985). Through their elaboration of forms of classifying, objectifying, and monitoring of people, the discourses of disciplines such as criminology, psychology, and medicine were inextricably bound up with the ratification of social institutions such as the prison, the hospital, and the factory. Such institutions became “laboratories” of observation from which bodies of knowledge about people were accumulated. These knowledges contributed to an enhancement and refine-

ment of the technologies of power through their incorporation into the practices and procedures of systematic, institutional regulation and surveillance. The factory was one key site in which these forms of power were elaborated. Foucault talks specifically about the standardization of actions, and the drilling and training of bodies in the factory. The aim of such practices was to facilitate productivity through economy and efficiency of movement and a controlled increase in the utility of the body (Rabinow, 1984).

While Foucault talks primarily about the earliest period of industrial capitalism, these same disciplinary technologies and power/knowledge relations are to be found in the labor processes and management systems that emerged in the early twentieth century in the forms of Taylorism and Fordism. Frederick Taylor (1911/1947), in his *Principles of Scientific Management*, described how productivity could be radically increased by carefully breaking down the labor process into its detailed components through time and motion studies and by fragmenting and reorganizing work tasks accordingly. Taylorism represented an attempt to increase productivity through a more rational organization of factory time and space, and through control of each step of the labor process (Blackburn, Coombs, & Green, 1985; Braverman, 1974). The coordination of these forms of labor discipline and management with assembly-line mass production technologies formed the core of Fordism (Blackburn et al., 1985; Doray, 1988).

These new relations of production, however, were as much cultural and symbolic as they were purely technical and economic. Mechanical methods of production could not be established without accompanying forms of *cultural* adjustment by labor to the factory regime. Specific forms of spatial and temporal discipline had to be imposed in the factory and the mechanical time clock of the factory day internalized by workers (Smart, 1985; Thompson, 1967). Taylor saw that the key to increasing output was to remove knowledge and control over the production process from labor and to place them in the hands of management. That knowledge, in the form of time and motion studies that examined the physical movements of workers with detailed precision, was then returned to the worker through practices that were exercised directly on the human body.

It was into this ensemble of social and technical relations that functional music was first introduced as a "disciplinary technology." A number of precedent schemes for piping music into domestic, work, and public spaces had existed since the turn of the century (Hulting, 1988).³ Experimental medical research on the physiological and psychological effects of music on human behavior had also been conducted since the late nineteenth century. These studies found that music had the ability to effect changes in blood pressure and muscular effort, and to increase respiration and pulse rates.⁴ Recognition of the potential industrial application of these findings was not far behind, and clinical uses of music to stimulate mind and body were soon being transferred into the fields of business and industry (Hulting, 1988). In 1937, two British industrial psychologists published a report for the British Industrial Health Research Board entitled *Fatigue and Boredom in Repetitive Work* (Wyatt & Langdon, 1937, cited in Husch, 1984), which suggested that music in the workplace had the potential to reduce absenteeism and early departures and enhance productivity in short-cycle, highly repetitive jobs. The report became something of a blueprint for

the first mass deployment of music in the workplace in Britain during the Second World War. Through radio programs like the BBC's "Music While You Work," the British government used music to relieve fatigue, sustain morale, and keep production at a peak in armaments factories (Lader, 1950). Reports of the British use of music programming, and its favorable effects on productivity and morale, reached American managers and military leaders. Both the War Production Board and RCA subsequently conducted investigations into the possible use of music in defense plants (Hulting, 1988). By 1942, music was being piped to war plants and shipyards around the clock throughout the United States (Friedrich, 1984), and by 1946 Muzak was installed in the workplaces of most major American firms, with separate programs for offices and factories (Cooke, 1946).

In the factory, Muzak functioned to attenuate the more grossly intolerable effects of the mechanized, assembly-line labor process, softening the edges of the more brutal aspects of Taylorism. Muzak became a variable to be added and subtracted in the complex of technical, economic, and social relations that constituted Fordism. The deployment of functional music in the factory was part of a general trend toward increased "social engineering" in industry. The knowledges and discourses of behavioral social science were placed at the service of industry and incorporated directly into the practices of Fordism and Taylorism in the forms of industrial psychology and labor/management studies. Under the gaze of these knowledges, the behavior and consciousness of workers became objects of "scientific" investigation and observation, to be quantified, categorized, and manipulated.

The research of the Muzak Corporation sits centrally in this tradition of behavioral social science, relying heavily, as it does, on the rhetoric of scientific rationalism and on medical discourses to lend legitimacy to its methods and findings. Muzak's marketing ideology is founded on claims to be able to motivate employees and increase productivity through scientifically proven physiological and psychological effects. In 1966, Muzak created its own board of "scientific advisors," composed of industrial psychologists and medical professionals, with the task of rationalizing the corporation's programming methods.⁵ One of the products of this research was the principle of "stimulus progression," a principle on which much of Muzak's programming was subsequently based.

The basic rationale for stimulus progression was derived from military research conducted in the early 1960s, the findings of which suggested that background music improved performance in "vigilance tasks" such as keeping track of targets on radar screens or distinguishing between friendly, unidentified, and enemy craft (Wokoun, 1963). It was found that music selections programmed in ascending order of "stimulation" made workers more consistently alert and attentive. This was subsequently confirmed by Muzak's own research, which suggested that music played in a planned sequence, progressing from less to increasingly more stimulating songs, had a much greater effect on worker efficiency than did a randomly programmed sequence (Keenan, n.d.).

Stimulus progression involved the application of "scientific" methods to the composition and arrangement of songs themselves. Muzak's programmers invented an "objective" method of arranging and categorizing individual tunes by means of tempo, rhythm, instrumentation, and orchestra size. Each tune was given a specific

"stimulus value," expressed numerically on a scale from 5, for bright and upbeat arrangements, to 1, for slow and mellow arrangements (Hulting, 1988). The individual arrangements, once rated, were then combined into whole programs or clusters of selections and stored in Muzak's library. Selections were programmed in 15-minute segments, alternating between 15 minutes of music and 15 minutes of silence. The silence was deemed necessary because continuous music was considered to lose its efficacy (MacLeod, 1979).

The overall aim of stimulus progression was to give workers a psychological lift at those moments of the day when they were most likely to become fatigued, particularly mid-morning and afternoon. Muzak's job was to offset these dips in efficiency in the course of the working day by creating a dynamic sense of forward movement in the listener and thereby fostering the illusion that time was passing. Work time could thus be broken down into seemingly discrete and unique segments of musical time. Workers experienced "progress" by moving through the musical programs, even if the job itself tended to give the impression of getting nowhere. Muzak thereby attempted to create its own particular organization of time in the workplace but to restrict any sense of temporal movement within a highly rationalized and ordered sound structure. These structures were the product of very specific methods of musical composition.

MUZAK AS CULTURAL FORM AND IDEOLOGY

The point is to make the worker feel better, because if he feels better, chances are he will work better. (President of the Muzak Corporation, quoted in MacLeod, 1979, p. 23)

Muzak's programs, from their inception, consisted of tight rearrangements of standard popular songs as well as classical and light dance music. Care was taken to remove any unique or potentially distracting rhythmic, melodic, or harmonic features found in the original versions. Dramatic shifts in volume or tempo were smoothed out. Atonal passages, sudden changes of key, or any features that might startle or confuse potential listeners were eliminated. Improvisation and spontaneity were highly restricted or nonexistent.⁶

There are a number of striking parallels here between Adorno's (1941/1990) account of a standardized "popular music" and the characteristic features and forms of Muzak. The analogies are perhaps more than coincidental given Muzak's origins in the interwar era, the same era in which the Tin Pan Alley radio music analyzed by Adorno was at the peak of its popularity. The arrangements, lyrics, and melodies of popular songs in the Tin Pan Alley era were subject to a similar process of rationalization and streamlining (Adorno, 1941/1990). Popular songs, in both contexts, were constructed like cars on an assembly line, their parts and components interchangeable (Gendron, 1986). In the 1930s and 1940s, something like a science of songwriting and arranging existed as much in the Tin Pan Alley system as it did in the Muzak Corporation's engineering department. Both systems of composition relied heavily on stock musical conventions and patterns (Middleton, 1990). Features such as rhythm, tempo, and timbre were manipulated to achieve different musical effects, a process that Adorno called "pseudo-individualization." Both "serious" music and "folk" forms, like jazz, blues, gospel, and country, were

subjected to an homogenizing process, to be served up to the listener in predigested forms. Adorno (1945) referred to this process as "Aunt Jemima's ready-mix for pancakes extended to the field of music" (p. 211). The overall effect was to anesthetize the listener by creating a "soporific" state of consciousness in which no thought or concentration was required (p. 212).

Like the popular radio music analyzed by Adorno, Muzak similarly represented a kind of "consensus" music, bringing together in its repertoire those songs that stood at the center of mainstream American popular culture. Muzak rearranged only the most familiar songs, with the lowest common denominator of appeal. By the early 1950s, the Muzak Corporation began to avoid music that was found by its surveys to be objectionable to more than one third of its listeners. Swing, jive, hillbilly, polka, and Hawaiian music were consequently eliminated from its office program (Hulting, 1988). Vocal parts were removed, since they were considered to introduce a humanizing element that might attract public attention.⁷ As Jane Jarvis, one of Muzak's former directors, explained, "The minute you use words, you call up contemplative thinking and people begin to have opinions" (Quoted in Radano, 1989, p. 450). Improvised or spontaneous instrumental solos were likewise avoided. In the words of one Muzak executive, "You can't give a drill press operator bebop or a hot lick on a saxophone . . . before you know it, he'll be beating time instead of working" (quoted in Lader, 1950, p. 58).

Muzak's aim was to be heard without being listened to, since music requiring close attention, by definition, could not be "functional" ("Muzak," 1947, p. 26). The result was a form that exhibited many of the characteristics attributed to "popular music" by Adorno—predictable, clichéd arrangements, lacking in abrasive tones, harmonic ambiguity, or rhythmic complexity, a music whose forms were almost wholly dictated by their function (Radano, 1989). Despite some recent modifications and updating of its arrangements, the bulk of Muzak programming remains highly standardized. While as recently as 1990 Muzak was reported to be placing a "standing moratorium" on organs, harmonicas, tubas, or any instruments that sounded "dated or hokey," features such as "heavy bass," "screeching guitars," "relentless drums," and "wailing saxophones" were still strictly forbidden (McDermott, 1990, p. 73; National Public Radio, 1991, p. 18).

For Adorno, one of the functions of popular music was to distract workers from the monotony of increasingly rationalized and mechanized work. It treated the symptoms of alienation and subordination, alleviating boredom and fatigue but without removing their causes. Popular music was, in the end, little more than "social cement," reinforcing existing social relations and power structures—entertainment as containment (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/1972). While perhaps not as monolithic in its effects as Adorno's "popular music," Muzak does aim, similarly, to communicate a sense of calm and predictability to the listening subject. It transforms and subtly redirects music's psychic economy into images and meanings that are socially acceptable and controllable within a disciplined setting (Husch, 1984). It does so by producing an overall feeling of pleasantness, inflected with a hint of nostalgia and fantasy but contained within a rational, orderly structure. The stylistic regularity and harmonic simplicity of Muzak suggest a secure, private, domestic world that signifies the comfort and security of home in

terms of a particular, bourgeois conception of domestic well-being (Radano, 1989, p. 456). Its aim is precisely to make one "feel at home" whether in an office, factory, or airplane.

That these cultural effects might have particular implications for women workers was not lost on industrial managers, who recognized early on music's potential as an instrument for maintaining efficiency among female employees specifically (Hulting, 1988). With the rising numbers of women workers in the post-war era, the possibilities of gender-specific music programming in the workplace became increasingly evident. Frith and McRobbie (1978–1979) noted that in Britain many employers in the service industries provided piped music or pop radio for their predominantly female work forces. "Music, like clean and pretty industrial design, is thought to soften the work place, making it homely and personal, increasing female productivity and lessening female job dissatisfaction" (p. 11).

To introduce popular music into the workplace, with its implicit connotations of entertainment, is to blur the distinction between work and leisure, factory and home. Popular music supplied by the management, Frith and McRobbie (1978–1979) have argued, can be an attempt to deliberately foster a feminine culture in the workplace. Pop's romantic conventions function to bring the sphere of the personal (the home) into the sphere of the impersonal (the factory). By feminizing the workplace, music encourages women workers to discount the boredom of repetitive work, deflecting them from more threatening collective activities.

One of the cornerstones of Muzak's marketing ideology has long been its claim to increase efficiency and productivity among all workers, male and female, in factory and office alike.⁸ One of the principal ways this has been accomplished, according to Muzak, is through the improvement of morale and the creation of a sense of "community" among employees. Originally, during wartime, functional music had been designed to "put shop-talk into the background" and build "factory goodwill," with medleys featuring employee requests and sing-alongs ("Wired Music for Wartime," 1942, p. 59). In 1946, Harry E. Houghton, then president of the Muzak Corporation, had promoted Muzak as a "morale builder." Houghton described its impact on workers who, he claimed, "used to drag when they came on for their ten-hour shift" but who now "practically dance to their machines" following the installation of Muzak (Cooke, 1946, pp. 245–246). Later, Muzak was represented as a "democratization" of "good music," promoting the "sharing of meaning" by "massifying a symbolism in which all can participate" (James Keenan, quoted in Friedrich, 1984, p. 110). Management very often liked to present background music as a "gift" to their work force, a signal to their employees that they were trying to create a warm, friendly environment (Baldwin, 1982; Levy, 1965).⁹ The chief aim of Muzak, in the Corporation's marketing ideology, continues to be that of humanizing the workplace, making workers feel more in control of their environment, more cared for by their employers, and generally more "happy" (Muzak Corporation, 1991).¹⁰

INTO THE FOREGROUND: MUZAK AND CONSUMPTION IN THE POST-FORDIST AGE

From the 1950s onward, functional music was to be heard in increasingly diverse contexts, from passenger ships, commercial airlines, sports stadiums, zoos, hospi-

tals, parks, cemeteries, and clinics to banks, swimming pools, hotel lobbies, and garbage dumps (Yoder, 1958).¹¹ By the 1970s, Muzak was being played in contexts ranging from the Pentagon and the White House to the Apollo space rockets and the American Embassy in Saigon during the evacuation of Vietnam (McDermott, 1990).

The most important shift during this period, however, was the expanded use of programmed music in the retail and service sectors. The growing application of Muzak to the management of consumption, rather than production, reflected the wider transition from a manufacturing to a service economy in the post-war period. In supermarkets, for example, music attempted to accommodate and lengthen the shopper's stay in the store by creating a "pleasant" atmosphere and by turning browsing into buying. Slower-paced music was specifically chosen to relax shoppers, make them walk more slowly, and thereby encourage them to spend more time in the store and make more purchases (McDermott, 1990). Muzak, it was claimed, could help promote the illusion of speedy check-out and was perceived by customers as a sign that the store cared for them (Keenan & Boisi, n.d.).

By 1984, restaurants, supermarkets, shopping malls, and offices had superseded factories as the primary recipients of Muzak's services, and a new kind of functional music began to emerge in the retail and service industry in the form of "foreground music." Foreground music was introduced to create appropriate sales environments in specific sites of consumption such as restaurants, bars, and clothing stores. The trend toward foreground music began, informally, among retail establishments with younger clienteles, who began installing their own music to create appropriate atmospheres and spaces (Foltz, 1985).¹² A number of new programmed music companies emerged to take advantage of and institutionalize this trend. Companies like Audio Environments Inc. (AEI) worked out licensing agreements with music publishers that enabled them to create prefabricated radio programming using original artists. AEI is now one of several companies that lease such programs to businesses throughout the United States, including chains such as the Limited, the Gap, TGI Friday's, and Red Lobster. Muzak responded to the emerging market for foreground music by introducing its own service in 1986, Foreground Music 1, providing specialized music formats for use in restaurants and retail stores (Gates & Johnson, 1984). In addition to FM1, Muzak now offers a range of different channels and formats, from classical and new age to jazz and pop hits.

Foreground music is increasingly used in conjunction with music video in retail stores where video screens are built into walls or mounted on pillars. Companies like Yesco and Sight and Sound Entertainment now market video foreground systems that transmit MTV-style videos shown on large screens in bars and restaurants (Foltz, 1985). Muzak also now provides its own music video service in the form of ZTV. The aim here is to create synergies between goods, sounds, and visual images, in which the connotations of specific music formats are transferred onto products in specific sites of consumption. Foreground music and video systems attempt to establish an atmosphere that is conducive to a "positive sales environment," one that can attract the desired clientele or market segment. In some clothing stores, for example, music is used to manufacture a "youthful" environment of consumption that makes the fashionable and the contemporary seem necessary. This use of music in the symbolic creation of space is part of a trend

toward "zoning" in retail stores. Here, particular music is used to create particular consumption environments, at different times of the day, often within the same institution or building (Eckel, 1989). In the office, too, music is now increasingly used as an "environmental tool of management" and presented as an integral part of "office ecology" and "landscaping" along with climate control, proper lighting, and color schemes (Jarvis, 1976, p. 16; Keenan, n.d.).¹³

These music services are now increasingly transmitted and distributed by satellite to offices, stores, and factories throughout the United States and internationally (National Public Radio, 1991). Through their satellite networks, companies like Broadcast International and Muzak are able to transmit a number of channels, each offering different musical formats, to stores equipped with reception dishes (Meyer, 1988).¹⁴ In this system, radio programming and music services can be relayed directly to receivers at the user site, where subscribers are able to choose different formats through data entry. One example of this is the phenomenon of in-store radio broadcasting, or "storecasting," where retailers can commission customized, chain-specific radio programming and point-of-purchase advertising (Meyer, 1988; Wollenberg, 1988).¹⁵

The restructuring of the functional music industry described here is just one instance of the broader shifts in patterns of capitalist accumulation that have occurred over the last quarter of a century, shifts toward post-Fordist regimes of production and consumption. While Fordist modes of accumulation were characterized by tendencies toward centralization, standardization, and economies of scale, post-Fordist patterns are characterized by decentralization, diversification, specialization, and mobility of production and distribution (Harvey, 1989). Under post-Fordism, capitalist accumulation relies increasingly on "flexibility" in terms of labor markets, products, and patterns of consumption. Profitability rests on the capacity to manufacture a variety of commodities, with shortened "half lives," cheaply and in small batches (p. 147). Flexible production of goods and services requires an acceleration of product turnover and corresponding shifts in modes of consumption. According to Harvey, these patterns are manifested, culturally, in a much greater attention to quick-changing fashions and a more sophisticated mobilization of all the artifices of need inducement.

In its initial pattern of deployment, as a standardized, homogenous form, distributed en masse from a central transmission point, Muzak was perhaps the epitome of Fordist modernism. The rise of foreground music, however, represents a fundamental shift away from this earlier system of uniform, preset programs and schedules, to one of much greater client control over programming and more responsiveness to subscribers' demands. In these newer systems, music is tailored to suit the needs of each client, by creating the appropriate consumption environment to match the appropriate commodities and consumers. This trend has been accompanied by a corresponding shift in musical emphasis away from homogenized instrumental versions of pop standards to a greater diversity of musical selections by original artists. Foreground music is an example of the general trend toward ancillary uses of music within media industries, where profits are derived from the sales of "rights" to use recorded music in film, television, or advertising, rather than from direct sales to consumers. Popular music is now increasingly harnessed to

diverse forms of profit making and sold as a "service" in terms of its ability to attach value to other, diverse commodities (Frith, 1989).

The economic and cultural transitions entailed by post-Fordism have subtly reconfigured the forms and uses of functional music. In the post-Fordist era, the command of space has become an increasingly important source of power in and over work, leisure, and everyday life. The profitable use of that space, and the regulation of consumption within it, is now crucial to the successful functioning of capitalism (Harvey, 1989). Orderly consumption requires particular spatial arrangements of commodities and consuming subjects. Programmed music systems have come to play an important role in the reproduction of this social and symbolic order. They are used to mark out and aestheticize these spaces, to invest them with symbolic meaning, and to define the relations of the self, to goods and to others in ways that enhance commercial interests.

CONCLUSION

It slips into the growing spaces of activity void of meaning and relations, into the organization of our everyday life: in all of the world's hotels, all of the elevators, all of the factories and offices, all of the airplanes, all of the cars, everywhere, it signifies the presence of a power that needs no flag or symbol: musical repetition confirms the presence of repetitive consumption, of the flow of noises as ersatz sociality. (Attali, 1977/1985, p. 111)

For Attali, Muzak is indicative of forms of power that are generalized and dispersed in their effects and that have no particular point of origin. Muzak is the sound of a nameless, faceless multinational corporate culture that shifts ever more fluidly across national boundaries, homogenizing as it goes. Attali considers mass music as a part of the more general category of "noise." In Attali's vision, the technologies of recording, ordering, transmitting, and listening in on noise have become weapons of power for corporate capital. The "monologue" of standardized, stereotypic music now imposes its own noise on others, silencing them. It accompanies and hems in a daily life in which no one has the right to speak. For Attali, Muzak is simply repetition. It articulates nothing more than orderly and repetitive consumption. Through its symbolic creation of value, it gives meaning to the meaningless. Through its fabrication of sociality and communal space, it attempts to organize everyday life, to provide a setting for social interaction and leisure activities, and to ferry people from space to space in a calm, orderly fashion.

One need not accept Attali's rather chilling vision of mass music in its totality to acknowledge that we do need a much broader notion of music's place in the contemporary soundscape, as well as a better understanding of the diverse ways in which it is implicated in the practices of power. Clearly, as Attali suggests, the coding, channeling, and dissemination of functional music is one way in which power is exercised in post-Fordist, capitalist societies. In the forms of its deployment, and its control over the arrangement and distribution of programmed sound, Muzak would seem to epitomize the more diffuse, anonymous practices of power characteristic of post-Fordist economic, cultural, and institutional relations. Functional music is a key example of power that exists systemically within the very networks, capillaries, and detailed operations of corporate institutions. The objects of this power are our subjectivities, our senses of self, and ultimately our very bodies. In

functional music, power is exercised through the production and regulation of these subjectivities, and the disciplining of feelings and emotions. It is a power whose purpose is to create "untroublesome" and "useful" social subjects (Gorbman, 1987, p. 57) as "workers" and "consumers."

Programmed music systems, whether in the form of radio, music video, or foreground or background music, have now become part of the accepted "common sense" of the urban public soundscape, insinuating themselves into the everyday in increasingly thorough and invisible ways. By encouraging non-reflective, non-intentional listening, and by producing low-level cognitive responses, functional music defies traditional notions of musical reception, use, and meaning. If we want to hold on to a definition of music as a dynamic and inherently *social* practice, which necessarily involves conscious, active, and creative responses on the part of both its producers and listeners, then perhaps we should begin to think of muzak not as music at all but as "a sonic form standing at the nexus of music and noise" (Radano, 1989, p. 457). Perhaps we need to reconsider some fundamental questions about the role of music, in particular, and noise, in general, in the contemporary soundscape. What kinds of noise and music might be considered valuable and important, politically and aesthetically? Who is to control the means of their production and public circulation? Perhaps we need to begin thinking about the kinds of musical forms that might most effectively challenge muzak, about those forms that might be most liberating, counter-hegemonic, and perhaps "dysfunctional." In the meantime, however, perhaps the best we can do, as an immediate, practical way of defeating muzak, is, as Schaefer (1977, p. 98) suggests, quite simply "to listen to it."

NOTES

¹We include here all prerecorded and programmed sound systems used in commercial and industrial contexts. By "functional" music, we mean music used principally to support and encourage some other primary activity, whether the production and consumption of goods and services or the reproduction of social and symbolic order in public spaces. While recognizing that all music has cultural and social functions, we use the term "functional" in this context to apply to music whose *primary* goals are utilitarian.

²The term "muzak" is used here interchangeably with functional and programmed music, reflecting the use of the term in popular discourse. However, when used in the capitalized form, "Muzak" should be taken to refer specifically to the products of the Muzak Corporation.

³As early as 1910, typing classes were being taught to the accompaniment of mechanically reproduced music to help students increase their typing speed. In 1915, Thomas Edison concluded from experiments that involved playing phonographs to workers in his own factories that music had the potential to solve industrial problems (Hulting, 1988).

⁴It is now accepted that music has the ability to create affective states and impulses that are not monitored by the analytical/cognitive portion of the brain and that touch unconscious associations and levels of mental activity that are connected with formative, emotional, and physiological experiences. It has been shown, for example, that sounds below the threshold of conscious hearing can be registered by the human brain. This partly explains why the impact of background music on its "listeners" is often relatively unconscious (Rosenfeld, 1985; Tagg, 1981).

⁵The board was headed by Dr. James Keenan, an organizational psychologist, who is also director of research at the Graduate School of Communications, Fairfield University (McDermott, 1990).

⁶"We don't sell music, we sell programming," said Donald O'Neil, former program director of the Muzak Corporation (Quoted in Green, 1957).

⁷Vocals have reportedly been played on Muzak's main program channel on only two occasions since: the first during the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979, when Muzak broadcast "God Bless America" several times nationally on the day of the hostages' return to the United States (Radano, 1989), and the second when Muzak played "We Are the World" in simultaneous broadcast with radio stations nationally in 1985 ("Fifth Avenue Singalong," p. 8).

⁸Muzak has conducted a number of its own studies of the effects of programmed music on the work performance of employees. For example, in a study conducted in 1958 in the accounts payable department of Lever Brothers, typing errors were found to be reduced by 38.6% among check typers as a result of Muzak being played (Zipser, 1958). Similar studies were conducted at Black and Decker, Blue Shield/United Medical Services Inc., Bulova Watch Co., and Mississippi Power and Light Company (Muzak Corporation, 1974).

⁹Significantly, though, labor rarely has any decision-making power over the deployment of Muzak, and it is seldom purchased for executive offices.

¹⁰The Muzak Corporation claims that 90% or more of the people who are exposed to its music enjoy what they are hearing (MacLeod, 1979; Yale, 1970-1971).

¹¹While in these contexts background music was used to construct an indoor, "public" environment, in others it was used to create outdoor "soundscapes," for example at tourist landmarks and places of "natural" beauty. Lull (1987) has vividly described how music is played at the site of a spectacular, naturally formed stone arch in the Natural Bridge of Virginia National Park: "When you walk down the river and turn the bend to get your first view of this enormous rock arch, you cannot help but notice immediately the sound of a lush string melody coming from all places, little speakers embedded in the cavernous 'natural' walls of the river bed. The 'sound track' for the Natural Bridge is meant, I suppose, to enhance the experience for visitors who are apparently considered to be unable to create the maximum experience for themselves. And, for those who want to store the memory of their visit to the Natural Bridge forever, a copy of the album is available at the gift shop on the way out" (p. 150-151).

¹²Assessing some of the underlying cultural reasons for this shift, Bruce Funkhouser, vice president of programming at Muzak, offered the following diagnosis: "I think what happened was that a generation brought up in the '60s and '70s came into their own as owners, managers, and bosses in all of these businesses and said, 'This [environmental music] is not the type of stuff I want. I worked to rock'n'roll when I went to high school, I worked to rock'n'roll when I went to college, and I want to work to rock'n'roll now' (Quoted in McCormick, 1991, p. 102). Jonathan Poneman, an ex-employee of Muzak and co-founder of the Seattle independent record label Sub Pop Records, had a different view of this trend, however: "Basically, it comes down to taking songs rich with subjective meaning and emotional content, sapping them of their meaning, then exploiting and reshaping them into the musical equivalent of track lighting for spoiled whining yuppies" (Quoted in McCormick, 1991, p. 102).

¹³It is interesting to note here that Umberto Muscio, Muzak's president from 1966 to 1980, formerly worked for Fedders, the air conditioning company, and saw continuities between air conditioning and Muzak as ways to improve the work environment (McDermott, 1990). Kirk Anderson, former general manager of Boston's Muzak office, made a similar point while commenting on the Field Corporation's takeover of Muzak from Westinghouse: "Westinghouse never really understood us. They put us with the radio group but we should have been with office furniture" (Quoted in McDermott, 1990, p. 71).

¹⁴In 1989, Muzak formed a partnership with the Weggenger Corporation, a company that develops products for satellite transmission of audio, data, and video (Eckel, 1989).

¹⁵In January 1988, Muzak and Point-of-Purchase Radio Inc. (POP) signed a deal with A & P to service its chain of stores with customized, in-store radio programming. "WA & P Radio" uses traditional formats, such as adult contemporary and easy listening, punctuated with DJ patter and commercial spots for in-store products. POP and Muzak envision a supermarket network that will eventually cover 15,000 stores (Wollenberg, 1988).

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